WEEK 4: GENERAL CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES (DDC, LCC, UDC — STRUCTURE AND FEATURES)

Introduction

General classification schemes are systems designed to cover **the entire field of human knowledge**, not just one discipline or subject area. They are comprehensive and are used in libraries that house materials on diverse subjects such as science, arts, religion, social sciences, and technology.

The three most widely used general classification schemes around the world — and in Nigeria — are:

1. **Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)**
2. **Library of Congress Classification (LCC)**
3. **Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)**

Each of these schemes has its own **structure, notation, and features** but shares the same goal — to organise knowledge systematically for easy access and retrieval.

Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)

Origin

The Dewey Decimal Classification was developed by **Melvil Dewey** in **1876**. It was first published as *A Classification and Subject Index for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library.* Dewey's idea was to create a simple, logical system that would be easy to use and expand over time.

Structure

DDC divides the entire field of knowledge into **ten main classes**, each represented by a group of three digits (000–900).
Each class is further divided into **ten divisions**, and each division into **ten sections**.
The structure is **hierarchical** and **decimal-based**, meaning that each class can be expanded by adding decimals to represent more specific topics.

Main Classes of DDC

Class Number	Main Class	Example Topics
000	Generalities	Encyclopaedias, Computer science
100	Philosophy & Psychology	Ethics, Logic
200	Religion	Christianity, Islam
300	Social Sciences	Sociology, Law, Education
400	Language	English, French, Yoruba
500	Pure Science	Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry
600	Applied Science	Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture
700	Arts & Recreation	Painting, Music, Sports

Class Number	Main Class	Example Topics
800	Literature	Poetry, Drama, Novels
900	History & Geography	Travel, Biography

Features of DDC

1. **Decimal Notation:** Uses Arabic numerals with decimals for expansion.

Example: 510 for Mathematics, 512 for Algebra, 512.5 for Group Theory.

2. **Hierarchical Structure:** Broader subjects are divided into narrower topics.
3. **Universality:** Covers all fields of knowledge.
4. **Flexibility:** Allows for the addition of new subjects through decimals.
5. **Ease of Use:** Simple and suitable for school and public libraries.
6. **Relative Index:** Provides alphabetical access to subjects and directs users to class numbers.
7. **Tables:** Includes auxiliary tables for geographical areas, languages, and forms.

Advantages of DDC

1. Easy to learn and apply.
2. Suitable for small to medium-sized libraries.\
3. Widely used, making it easy to share records.

Disadvantages

1. Not detailed enough for very large or specialised collections.
2. Western bias — lacks depth in indigenous and African subjects.
3. Sometimes too rigid in representing modern interdisciplinary topics.

Library of Congress Classification (LCC)

Origin

The Library of Congress Classification was developed in the **United States** in the early **20th century** for use in the **Library of Congress**. It was designed by **Herbert Putnam** with contributions from various subject experts. Unlike DDC, it was meant for large academic and research libraries.

Structure

LCC divides knowledge into **21 main classes**, each represented by **one or two letters of the alphabet**. Each class is subdivided by **numbers** to indicate specific subjects.

Main Classes of LCC

Class Letter	Subject Area
A	General Works
B	Philosophy, Psychology, Religion

Class Letter	Subject Area
C	History – Auxiliary Sciences
D	World History
E–F	History of the Americas
G	Geography, Anthropology, Recreation
H	Social Sciences
J	Political Science
K	Law
L	Education
M	Music
N	Fine Arts
P	Language and Literature
Q	Science
R	Medicine
S	Agriculture
T	Technology
U	Military Science
V	Naval Science
Z	Bibliography and Library Science

Features of LCC

Alphabetical Notation: Uses letters and numbers (alphanumeric system).

Example: QH301 for Biology, HF5001 for Business.

Detailed and Flexible: Allows for expansion as knowledge grows.

Subject-Specific Development: Each main class developed by subject experts.

Cutter Numbers: Uses **Cutter tables** to represent authors and titles.

Suited for Large Libraries: Designed for universities, research, and national libraries.

Advantages of LCC

Very detailed and comprehensive.

Well-suited for large collections.

Uses letters, which make notation short and clear.

Allows easy integration with online catalogues and OPACs.

Disadvantages

Complex to learn compared to DDC.

Lacks a relative index like DDC.

Not as widely used in small libraries.

Developed with Western bias, so African topics may not fit neatly.

Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)

Origin

The Universal Decimal Classification was developed by **Paul Otlet** and **Henri La Fontaine** in **1895** in Belgium. It is based on Dewey's Decimal system but expanded for international and scientific documentation.

Structure

UDC retains Dewey's **ten main classes (000–900)** but allows for complex relationships between subjects using special symbols like :, /, +, and =.
It is highly **faceted** and suitable for **scientific and technical documentation**.

Features of UDC

Decimal Notation: Similar to DDC but allows combination of subjects.

Example: 621.397:004 means "Electronics in relation to computers."

Common Auxiliaries: Represents place, time, language, and form.

Use of Symbols:

: = relationship between subjects

/ = range of numbers

+ = addition of subjects

International Scope: Designed for global application.

Used for Indexing: Ideal for databases and research documentation centres.

Advantages of UDC

Very detailed and expressive.

Handles complex, multidisciplinary subjects.

Useful for scientific and research institutions.

Disadvantages

Difficult to learn and apply.

Requires specialised training.

Not commonly used in school or public libraries.

Comparison of DDC, LCC, and UDC

Feature	DDC	LCC	UDC
Developer	Melvil Dewey (1876)	Library of Congress (1904)	Paul Otlet & Henri La Fontaine (1895)
Notation	Pure numbers	Letters + numbers	Numbers + special symbols
Structure	Decimal, hierarchical	Alphanumeric, subject-based	Decimal, faceted
Use	Public/school libraries	Academic/research libraries	Special/research centres
Coverage	Universal	Universal	Universal (technical bias)
Complexity	Simple	Moderate to complex	Complex
Relative Index	Yes	No	Yes
Flexibility	Moderate	High	Very high

Summary

General classification schemes are the foundation of knowledge organisation in libraries.

DDC provides simplicity and ease of use.

LCC offers flexibility and depth for academic libraries.

UDC allows for detailed and complex classification of technical materials.

Together, they form the backbone of information organisation and retrieval across the world.

Class Exercise

Which of the three schemes is most suitable for Nigerian university libraries, and why?